



# CHANCELLOR'S NOTES

Chancellor Rhee's regular newsletter on learning, schools and system-wide reforms in DC Public Schools

---

July 2, 2010

## Summertime in DCPS



Students have celebrated their last day of school for the year, and as the heat drove them through city parks to catch the spray of lawn sprinklers in city parks, there was no question that summertime had begun in Washington, DC. Teachers have been clearing out their classrooms to make way for facilities improvements this summer and new students in the fall, and this is the time of year when people look at us enviously.

"So when does your vacation start?" they ask. "This must be your slow time."

Ha! This is one of our busiest times of year.

### Teachers – Lifelong Learners, Travelers and the Bedrocks of Summer School Instruction

Teachers may be on a well-deserved break from the classroom, but few educators get through a school year successfully without the preparation and continued education that this time can provide. Some teachers even stay in the classroom all year, teaching summer school or taking courses toward additional certification or master's degrees.

Others attend conferences or seek professional development travel opportunities. Read their stories on [our website](#), including a teacher traveling to England to study in his content area, and a curriculum developer at McKinley Tech who meets with CEOs of technology companies in the summer to learn about new skills our students will need to be successful.

## Students – Learning, but let’s not call it work...

Sprinkler hopping aside, summer is also an extremely important cognitive time for students, and summertime activities play a significant role in student performance during the year.

According to the National Summer Learning Association, skills lost every summer account for two-thirds of a ninth-grade achievement gap that researchers have identified between students in lower- and higher-income homes.

During the school year, the skills of children in lower-income homes improve at close to the same rate as those of their more advantaged peers. However, children in middle- and upper-income homes tend to continue to improve in their skills over the summer, while children in lower-income homes are more likely to fall behind.

Children also gain two to three times more weight during the summer than they do during the school year, and minority children are at even higher risk for weight gain when they are out of school.

This research is something for all parents to pay attention to, no matter what the family income is. I urge parents to plan their summer trips and days considering the importance of summer learning to your child’s success in school and life. Maximizing student learning during this time is critical to giving your children the skills they will need to compete once they graduate as young adults.

### *Ideas for Parents*

We need your help. Children may not rally at the chance to study every night, but there are so many other ways we parents can introduce learning over the summer. All we have to do is take advantage of our children’s curiosity and throw in some strategic creative challenges. Especially in Washington, DC, parents can absorb children in learning without draining finances.

We will post some [ideas for parents on our website](#), along with an interactive option for you to share your best ideas with other parents.

This summer, whether your children are chasing butterflies with you at the [U.S. Botanic Garden](#), learning leadership skills as a swim team captain at a [Department of Parks and Recreation](#) summer camp, or escaping into a cool corner of the [DC Public Library](#) to discover new favorite books, summer enrichment can light fires for learning that they bring to their classrooms in August.

### *DC Students Learning Across the Globe*

Not all students plan to stay in DC this summer. In fact, through a variety of partnerships and scholarships, they will be all over the world, and we'll also share their stories with you.

High school students will be traveling to China to study Chinese language and culture through the Department of State's National Security Language Initiative for Youth Program, and others will pursue educational experiences in Spain, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Turkey. One student at Hart Middle School, Cristal Sandoval, was admitted to the Fulbright Junior Internship Program in Korea. Congratulations to all our scholarship winners and travelers!

### *Summer School and Professional Internships*

Especially for students who are falling behind academically, summer school helps them to catch up and prepare for the challenges of the next school year. Almost 10,000 students will be participating in [summer school](#) this year!

Summer school began this week at four middle school sites, and 17 elementary schools that offer academic instruction and enrichment activities to create an educational experience that is unique to summer.

At the high school level, students are thinking about their post-graduation plans, taking career development courses and critical courses for graduation, and working in exciting internships in government and private industry across the city.

## **DCPS – Preparing for an Exciting New School Year**

The rest of us at DCPS will take full advantage of every empty classroom to prepare for an exciting new school year in the fall.

### *School Modernization*

Under Mayor Fenty's ambitious plans for school modernization, the summer provides a narrow window of time for construction teams from the [Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization \(OPEFM\)](#) to bring the many resources they have into schools to improve them. I am amazed at what they do every summer in such a short period of time.

For example, students from Eastern Senior High School and Stoddert Elementary School will walk into shiny new buildings in the fall, and this month OPEFM will begin work on whole new facilities for Anacostia SHS and Wilson SHS. Nine schools are receiving classroom modernizations, and nearly 200 classrooms will be modernized by summer's end.

Teams will also be in schools across the district: installing additions, building new playgrounds, renovating cafeterias, updating plumbing, and more. Even considering the modernization efforts that the mayor and OPEFM have led in DCPS already, this is more modernization work than has been accomplished in previous summers.

## *School Innovation*

Our office of School Innovation is especially busy this summer. We are working to create a portfolio of compelling schools across the District, which means that every summer we are getting ready to launch new programs in the fall.

With all that is new and improved coming to DCPS next year, staff are busy planning getting [partnerships](#) off the ground at schools needing academic turnarounds, preparing to open new themed [Catalyst Schools](#) focused on the Arts, World Cultures or [Science, Technology, Engineering and Math/STEM](#) and planning for [International Baccalaureate \(IB\)](#) programs. (That's just the beginning—I'm not sure when they take their summer vacations!)

## *Looking Back, then Focusing Forward*

We love summertime as much as you do, but I hope I've dispelled the notion that a school system takes a good long break when June rolls around. It may be almost 100 degrees outside, but three years into the reform of the DC Public Schools, students and staff are not slowing down! When so much work remains, we can't afford to.

As I look back on the past three years, I am very proud of what our students, teachers, principals, parents and staff have accomplished. I am energized to welcome new and returning students in the fall, and I am confident and hopeful about the new strides we will take in our future.

Here's wishing you a wonderful summer, filled with learning, lawn sprinklers and, if you are lucky, curious children to share them with!

## You are invited

Monday, August 23, 2010 is the first day of school! You are invited to [enroll your child now](#). When parents enroll in the summer, DCPS is better able to plan for the upcoming year and ensure that schools have all the resources they need. Please see [dcps.dc.gov](#) for details or enroll at your child's school.

## Share this. Tell us what you think.

To reply to this e-newsletter, send an email to Peggy O'Brien, Chief of Family & Public Engagement, at [Peggy.O'Brien@dc.gov](mailto:Peggy.O'Brien@dc.gov)

[Add your email address to the Chancellor's Notes list and other e-news from DCPS.](#)

[View past editions of Chancellor's Notes.](#)

**Share this via email, Facebook, Twitter and more!** [Go to full online version](#) and click "Share" icon at the top of the page.

